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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001675

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: MIC CENSURE OF FINGAZ POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED

REF: A. HARARE 1345

[B](#). HARARE 988 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell for reasons 1.5 b/d

Summary

[1](#). (C) On December 1, the Media and Information Commission (MIC) gave the Financial Gazette newspaper seven days to retract an article the paper had published or face charges under the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). The article accused the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) of pressuring the MIC to refuse a license to the closed independent daily newspaper The Daily News (TDN). The Financial Gazette is standing by the story and has refused to publish a retraction. Its news editor speculated the MIC,s ultimatum was the result of ZANU-PF infighting and was directed at Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono, the paper,s majority owner. End Summary.

MIC Censures Financial Gazette

[2](#). (U) On December 1, the Financial Gazette, a semi-independent weekly, whose majority shareholder is Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono, published a story claiming that the MIC had voted in June to grant a license to The Daily News, because there was no legal basis for denying it. TDN had been closed by the government in 2003 but had won a court judgment requiring the MIC to consider a fresh application (ref B). According to the news report, the CIO had then pressured MIC commissioners to reverse the decision. The source for the story, former commissioner Jonathan Maphenduka, said he had resigned in protest after the denial of the license was announced.

[3](#). (U) On December 2, MIC commissioner Tafataona Mahoso announced that the Commission was censuring the Financial Gazette and gave the paper seven days to agree to retract the story and allow the MIC to publish a rebuttal in the paper. He threatened the paper with charges under AIPPA if it failed to respond. In his statement, Mahoso said the story had sought to discredit a quasi-judicial body, which he claimed was a violation of the media law.

MIC Editor--No Retraction Forthcoming

[4](#). (C) On December 8, the day before the ultimatum was to expire, Financial Gazette news editor Nelson Banya told Embassy staff that the paper stood by the story and had no intention of publishing a retraction. The paper,s lawyer had determined that there was absolutely no violation of law and had communicated the paper,s decision to the MIC. Banya said Mahoso,s ultimatum was a bluff and he was interested in seeing how Mahoso handled the embarrassment of dealing with the paper,s refusal to retract. (Comment: As of December 12, the MIC had taken no further action against the paper. However, the Commission has in the past pushed forward with prosecutions that appear to have no legal merit and may yet follow through on its ultimatum.)

MIC Attack Due to Gono Rivalry with Mujurus

[5](#). (C) Banya said the more important reason for the MIC ultimatum was internal ZANU-PF politics. Banya claimed that the ruling party faction, led by Vice President Joyce Mujuru and her husband, retired General Solomon Mujuru, felt threatened by Gono, whom it saw as a potential rival for the post-Mugabe succession. Gono owned a majority share of the paper, which had published several exposes of the Mujurus and their supporters, business dealings. The Mujurus viewed Gono,s ownership of the paper and its attacks on them as proof of his political aspirations. Banya said Gono owned about 70 percent of the paper. However, he did not directly influence its content and Banya said that, as news editor, he felt no pressure to cut stories or slant them any particular

way. That said, he admitted the paper,s financial reporting avoided criticism of Gono and the RBZ,s monetary policies.

16. (C) Banya added that Mahoso had taken the Financial Gazette story as a personal attack on himself. Mahoso had been his teacher in college and had been a committed socialist and an idealist. However, Mahoso had now become self-important, driving around in a brand-new sport utility vehicle and using police to guard his home, and this had made it easy for the Mujurus to use him to attack Gono.

Moyo Also After the Financial Gazette

17. (C) Banya added that, to his knowledge, there was no truth to the stories in the weekly newspaper The Independent, claiming that the Financial Gazette was partially owned by the CIO. The Independent,s publisher, Trevor Ncube, was a good friend of former Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, and Banya speculated that the paper,s attack on the Financial Gazette was on behalf of Moyo, who felt that the Financial Gazette was not sufficiently supportive of his new political party, the United People,s Movement (UPM).

Information Ministry Rivalries

18. (C) Banya offered several insights into the GOZ,s propaganda machine. He said Information Minister Tichaona Jokonya was very ill and tired and had not wanted the position but had been brought back from New York (where he had been UN Ambassador) at the Mujurus, behest. George Charamba, the Permanent Secretary at the ministry was really running the ministry. However, Charamba was not a Mujuru supporter. Banya said Deputy Information Minister Bright Matonga was corrupt and was attempting to collect as many farms and investments as he could while in office.

19. (C) ZANU-PF spokesman Nathan Shamuyarira, who had promoted Matonga into the job, was Charamba,s real rival for control of the machine. Shamuyarira wanted to reorganize the ministry, weed out former supporters of Jonathan Moyo, and establish for himself the kind of power Moyo had gained through control of the state media. Banya said, however, that regardless of the personalities involved the government,s attempts to curb the media were ultimately futile. He claimed that most of the news on the Internet was written by reporters from the state media and even police officers. With insiders writing news reports, eventually all the government,s misdeeds would and did come out.

Comment

110. (C) Banya,s description of a Gono-Mujuru rivalry contradicts reports from other sources connecting Gono with the Mujuru faction. In the hothouse atmosphere that ZANU-PF is becoming, both could be correct. Our sense is that intra-party alliances are shifting constantly as the major players try to position themselves for political power in the post-Mugabe era. Meanwhile, Gono, the Mujurus and the other ZANU-PF players, nervous about whether ZANU-PF will be able to retain power at all, are competing to steal as much as they can while still in power.

DELL